

# info sheet

today's fight for tomorrow's freedom

## What was the Transatlantic Slave Trade?

The Transatlantic Slave Trade, also known as *Maafa* (a Kiswahili word that translates as great disaster or tragedy) was the legally sanctioned kidnap and transportation of African men, women and children from their homelands to the Americas to work as slaves to cultivate produce such as sugar, tobacco, indigo and mahogany. The wealth produced as a result of this forced labour transformed Britain into an industrial nation, and consequently into one of the richest and most powerful nations on earth.

### Abolition and legacy

The approval of the Act to abolish the Slave Trade in March 1807 was the culmination of hundreds of years of sustained resistance against the system by enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and the campaign of British abolitionists.

However, this did not mean that slavery was abolished in the British colonies, and emancipation of the enslaved workers did not take place until 1838.

The legacies of enslavement and the trafficking in Africans continue to affect the lives of their descendants throughout the Diaspora and the continent. Racism, discrimination and the underdevelopment of Africa and the Caribbean contrasts significantly with the wealth and development of Europe and the United States of America.

The mobilisation of ordinary people against the Transatlantic Slave Trade was the first mass movement on an international human rights issue and helped to build a consensus against the use of slavery and raise consciousness about global rights and justice issues.



above: Depiction of a runaway slave which was often used in notices offering a reward for their return. Escaping slavery was a difficult and dangerous endeavour, which on recapture would be severely punished, and could be fatal, but the desire to find freedom was powerful and consuming.

### Narratives

The history of the abolition of the trafficking in Africans and eventual emancipation has largely been told and interpreted through the eyes of white abolitionists; individuals like William Wilberforce have been immortalised as having accomplished the abolition of the trade in Africans and emancipation single-handedly. The truth is that African people played the most significant role in liberating themselves; the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) resulted in the first republic found by Africans outside the African continent. The role of British women and the working class who organised petitions and campaigns to boycott goods produced using slave labour also played a significant part in lobbying for the abolition of slavery. Conversely, some religious groups, the church, plantation owners, merchants and business societies fought to maintain the trade.

Narratives from the participants involved at all levels of the Transatlantic Slave Trade are useful in providing a broader view of the conditions and experiences at the time. **The Recovered Histories** website is a comprehensive resource that chronicles the narratives of those that were involved in the trade and trafficking in Africans as well as the views of Africans themselves and highlighting their intellectual arguments against slavery and their fight for emancipation.

**“Do they remember our painful labours, and the mass of wealth they used to extract from our blood during the ten years of life and misery which was the estimated term of our existence? All is well remembered!”**  
**Baron De Vastey,**  
**Secretary to King Henri**

## Teaching about the Transatlantic Slave Trade

2007 marks the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act 1807 and this anniversary has proved useful in lobbying for changes to be made to the National Curriculum and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to include compulsory teaching about the Transatlantic Slave Trade during History lessons at Key Stage 3. The Transatlantic Slave Trade and its legacies can also be taught within schemes of work for English, Geography, Citizenship and Religious Education. A range of resources, lesson plans and ideas for activities are available to support teachers in teaching the subject including the websites: [www.recoveredhistories.org](http://www.recoveredhistories.org) and [www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/](http://www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/)

**“...the habitual exercise of that arbitrary dominion that the master possesses over the slave communicates an involuntary bias, even to well disposed minds, against the just claims of humanity, and that it is difficult if not impossible, to interpose effectual laws restraining such dominion”.**

**A Jamaican planter**

**“If the commerce in Africa was not carried on by Great Britain, it would be by our commercial rivals the French and the Dutch, from whom we must be contented to get a clandestine supply of Negroes or our colonies would decline so rapidly, as to be no longer worth the national attention or regard”.**

**G. Franklyn Esq.**

## About Anti-Slavery International

Anti-Slavery International, founded in 1839, is committed to eliminating all forms of slavery throughout the world. Slavery and forced labour deny basic dignity and fundamental human rights. Anti-Slavery International works to end these abuses by campaigning for the eradication of slavery, exposing current cases, supporting the initiatives of local organisations to release people the 12 million people that are presently enslaved, and pressing for more effective implementation of international laws against slavery. For further information see:

[www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org)

Anti-Slavery International is a registered charity, 1049160

## Take Action

Anti-Slavery International's Fight for Freedom campaign aims to revitalise the abolitionist spirit of 200 years ago and harness it to make the eradication of all forms of slavery a priority for every government in the world.

Tens of thousands of ordinary people signed petitions as part of the campaign to abolish the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Today Anti-Slavery International works to combat contemporary forms of slavery, which affect at least 12 million people around the world. Join the Fight for Freedom and be part of a new mass movement for change.

Sign the Declaration online at:

[www.antislavery.org/2007](http://www.antislavery.org/2007)

to call for measures that will enable individuals, governments and the public to understand the slave trade, redress its legacies and eradicate modern slavery: